



***Something to Ponder on the Lenten Journey,
A Gift of DuBois Center & Green DuBois***

A Lenten Devotional written for and dedicated to
DuBois Center,
the camp and retreat center of the Illinois South Conference
of the United Church of Christ
and to introduce a new initiative
Green DuBois,
which celebrates, honors and shares the wonder of
the biodiversity of God found in this sacred setting

*Written by Donald C. Wagner
Photographs by Angela Hausmann, Marty Kemper, Scott Kuether,
Jason Petry and other DuBois Center Photographers
Edited by Jill Baker*

Foreword

‘Never make a suggestion in a Committee meeting that you are not willing to take on and complete.’

That is the lesson I have learned here . . . and it is a lesson I have delighted in undertaking. In a small group meeting of those interested in the Green DuBois initiative several months ago, our Chairperson, Dr. Jill Baker, asked for suggestions which might assist in getting the word out about Green DuBois into the churches and the wider world. First suggestions had to do with developing a website, creating a Facebook page, having Green DuBois ambassadors reach out into the churches and communities of our Conference, contacting the Missouri Botanical Garden, the University of Illinois Extension Service and a wide variety of other Master Gardener, bird watcher and botanist groups. In each case, the desire is to promote DuBois Center as a hotbed of year-round biodiversity which, until now, has largely gone unnoticed, undiscovered and undeveloped as a sacred trust.

With the perseverance and dedication of Mr. Marty Kemper, whose research, photographs and direction have opened up the biologically diverse treasure chest of DuBois Center to the world, not only has the Green DuBois Committee and the DuBois Staff become keenly aware of the gifts around us in this place, but there is a heartfelt desire to share these wonders with the wider community. DuBois Center is a one-of-a-kind setting where ‘Church’ happens all the time and now the congregation has the potential to be expanded in a very intentional, stewardship-focused and environmentally-friendly manner. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Marty Kemper for his untiring work and kind guidance to this difficult task. We also owe a similar debt of gratitude to Dr. Jill Baker for recognizing in Marty’s work the potential which is just down the trails, across the lake, next to the cabins and near the horse barn of DuBois Center. When either of them speaks of this adventure, they smile from ear-to-ear, inviting those with whom they speak into another world of wonder. Thank you both!!

The Lenten Devotional, Something to Ponder on the Lenten Journey, A Gift of DuBois Center & Green DuBois, is the result of making a suggestion at the end of meeting and having the Chairperson simply and powerfully look at you and say, “Good idea. Will you take care of that?” How does anyone ever tell Dr. Jill Baker ‘No’? I certainly couldn’t. Neither could the photographers whose work is on showcase throughout this work.

Many, many thanks to Mr. Martin Kemper, Mr. Jason Petry and Ms. Angela Hausmann and other DuBois Center photographers for sharing their visions and understandings of DuBois Center as seen through the unblinking lens of a camera. Hundreds of photographs have been distilled to arrive at these few for this devotional – and this is just a sampling of what DuBois Center is year-round, patiently awaiting your personal visit.

So this serves, too, as your invitation to experience God, in the Presence of Jesus Christ and in the Power of the Holy Spirit as only DuBois Center and Green DuBois might offer their insights and understandings on this holy ground. Come, everyone is welcome here!

The scriptural basis for each of the daily devotionals is a verse from the Psalm of the day, as prescribed by the Revised Common Lectionary. They seemed to me a common thread, a rooting of our Christian Lenten journey in the hymnody of our Jewish sisters and brothers. I

hope you find this helpful to you, as well. All passages are from the Common English Bible translation, abbreviated CEB.

You are free to share this devotional with whomever you choose, but please remember to credit all photos as they are credited throughout, either to Angela Hausmann , Martin Kemper, Scott Kuether, Jason Petry, Don Wagner, or other photographers. I would ask that you would do the same with all of the printed materials which I have written and offer to you. They are copyrighted to ©Donald C. Wagner, 2019.

A word of thanks needs to be extended to the St. Paul United Church of Christ, Lebanon, faith family which allowed me the time and space necessary to create this piece – and to our Office Manager, Ms. Becky Harrison, who rode herd on the office visitors, edited copies and prodded me on to conclude it when time seemed limited. Thank you.

Special thanks, too, to my lovely, patient and forbearing wife, partner and helpmate, Nancy. She put up with my odd moments of inspiration, the challenges along the way and kept me focused on our mutual love for and admiration of DuBois Center. I love you.

Lastly, I need to take a moment to thank God. You have called me to a ministry I never expected, sustain me when I am weary, share the joy in my heart when your people ‘get it’ and You never let me go. The Christ of my faith is beside me always. The Spirit of my heart is in me always. All because of You. May this work and all that I am be a glory to You, now and forever. Thank You. Amen.

Don Wagner



DuBois Center

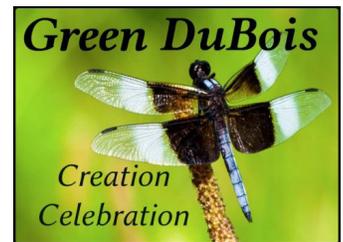
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ASH WEDNESDAY ***The Holy Season of LENT begins***

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them.”

Matthew 16:24-25 CEB

I remember a time when I thought of Ash Wednesday and the Season of Lent as a lonely time, a solitary time, a time designed to encourage individual prayer, repentance and preparation for the One who comes to save. I dreaded Ash Wednesday and Lent much as a child shies away from nearing discipline: Though you know you are going to learn from the event, you aren't anxious for the potential pain through which one must go.

Then one sunny Summer afternoon, while a part of a Work Camp at DuBois Center, a church camp of the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ, our Counselor invited the members of our group to make a cross using only our fingers joined together. As we took time figuring out how to make that cross happen, our Counselor read from his ratty old Bible the Matthew 16 text and Jesus' call to the disciples, after which he used his hands to complete the bottom of the cross.

In that moment I realized for the very first time that taking up the cross and times such as Ash Wednesday and Lent were never meant to be lonely, solitary places for individual prayer, repentance and preparation. Taking up the cross is a communal moment, one meant to remind us that we are never alone, that Jesus goes before us, with us, in us, above us and below us. As my friends and I joined fingers together, so our lives were simply, powerfully bound together in a mutual pledge of strength and support wherever this thing called 'faith' takes us.

Ash Wednesday and the entire Lenten journey is for the community, the community of faith desiring to grow in faith, daring to follow in the example of Jesus and humble enough to understand that there is more, much more to learn and do than any one of us can accomplish alone. Maybe that is why God sent Jesus, maybe that is why Jesus gathered 12 disciples around Him . . . and maybe that is why during Lent we gather still. God will never let us alone. The (finger) cross and the empty Tomb are our guarantees of this Good News in every age. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In the ashes of my perceived isolation, remind me of your Holy Community, O God, and give me the heart to walk with You, even as You walk with us all in Jesus. Amen.



DAY TWO OF LENT

*“Living in the Most High’s shelter,
camping in the Almighty’s shade, I say to the Lord,
“You are my refuge, my stronghold!
You are my God – the one I trust!””*

Psalm 91:1-2 CEB

Sometimes it is the slow walk, the mindful journey, the measured steps, which bring us to the heart of who and Whose we are.

In the rush of all that is progress, artificial intelligence, information technology, virtual reality and the ever-nearing crush of the world community upon everyday existence, it is becoming increasingly important to find time to be apart with God. It is that simple – and that difficult. The Psalmist invites us to begin the journey of Lent where Creation resides, to claim the One who breathes into dust and calls forth all things, and to trust the Most High as our Refuge and Stronghold, regardless our station along the road. In establishing such a sure root each new morning, we are not held to one moment, but freed to fully celebrate the journey of Life, grounding our every moment in the Being of the One who holds us in Love and honors our steps, more than we could ever know.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In our need to be relevant in the current age, Lord, remind us of our even deeper need to be true to You and each other along the way. Grant us such a heart for a quiet walk, a simple prayer and a lifetime of pitching our tent in You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DAY THREE
OF LENT
*“Because you’ve
made the Lord
my refuge,
the Most High,
your place of
residence –
No evil will
happen to you;
no disease will
come close to
your tent.”*
Psalm 91:9-10
CEB



Almost lost in the milieu of a summer’s evening near the lakes and woods of DuBois Center is the quiet flight of the Dragonfly. Flitting from one outpost to another, constantly assessing available food sources, resting on one reed before setting sail into the shadows and cool of a neighboring tree, the Dragonfly trusts life as it encounters it. Living for only an average of seven months, from larva to adult, the Dragonfly rides the currents of life’s journey as it searches for mosquitoes, mayflies, flies and small insects, while seemingly casting a knowing look at all who stand in awe of its beauty.

Believed to be a symbol of good luck and new life, the Dragonfly invites creation to slow down, rest a while, eat what you need, move when you are inspired, watch out for predators and, occasionally, bless the casual passerby with a close flight or even a landing. Though seemingly whimsical in all it does, there is purpose, even spirit, in the life of the Dragonfly as its wings slowly move in the sacred prayer of adoration before the One whose Breath gave it air currents to soar upon.

“Because you’ve made the Lord my refuge, the Most High, your place of residence . . .” The Psalmist does not call us to the life of the Dragonfly, but to the trust of the Dragonfly for the life it enjoys. The Lenten journey invites us to reconnect with Dragonfly and daily grind alike, considering where our heart finds its home and our spirit finds its purpose. By whose hand are you fed? In whose soul were you imagined? In what place or time do you find refuge?

As you consider the lilies of the field with Jesus, do not forget the example of the Dragonfly which flits among them. To such as these, to such as you, belongs the Kingdom. Trust it. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In my rushing from soccer practice, to work, to home and back to the gym, slow me down, Lord, to watch and value the life of the Dragonfly. May my trust be in you for all I am and ever will be, that I may find my rest along Your way. Amen.



DAY FOUR OF LENT

*“They will carry you
with their own hands so
you don’t bruise your
foot on a stone.”*

Psalm 91:12 CEB

The thought of a horse being one of God’s messengers to help and

protect you probably never crossed your mind unless, of course, you are a horse lover. If you are a horse lover, you have probably never thought of horses as anything less than a messenger of God, a divine gift from the Divine Giver to be a great protector and helper. Quite simply, there is something between a horse and its human. If you have never experienced such a feeling, arrange to take a ride on one of DuBois Center’s horses, they have a lot to teach you.

The resident hooved theologians of DuBois Center come with a wide variety of names and from a myriad of places. Some have aged out of former vocations, others just needed a new home, some have been rescued, but all of them are messengers of God in the current age speaking deep truths to those budding or skilled equestrians who would dare to listen.

There is something about a quiet walk in the woods mingled with a horsy sigh, a light neigh or a shuddering flank. Trees seem smaller, the thickets less dense, the sounds more clear. Somewhere above, a red tail hawk observes your progress, keeping a keen eye to the ground in the event your walk or trot causes its next meal to scurry into an opening.

Then your mount shakes its mane as to attract your attention and, having brought you to alert, you begin to notice the puddles over which you travel, the rocks which might have bruised your foot and the critters which scurry about from tree to tree. This world is about far more than you, yet God comes to walk with you, to carry you when necessary and to protect you before you ever knew you needed a protector.

With a swish of its tail, the diving horsefly is dispatched and the resulting breeze cools your sweat dampened skin. Sometimes not every biting enemy meets you face to face, sometimes not every humid day can be met with a fan and, sometimes, not every lesson is taught by a teacher in a classroom. Sometimes our best lessons are learned from God’s messengers who carry us, nip at us, tease us, nuzzle us and love us. Sometimes, it is our saddled weight upon their backs which make us feel the master, but it is their sure and certain strength, wisdom and faith which carries us through.

Who is it that carries you? Helps you? Protects you? They are God’s messengers among us. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Allow me the grace to recognize and thank all of Your messengers among us, O God. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

*“God says, “Because you are devoted to me, I’ll rescue you.
I’ll protect you because you know my name.
Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer.
I’ll be with you in troubling times.
I’ll save you and glorify you.
I’ll fill you full with old age.
I’ll show you my salvation.””*

Psalm 91:14-15 CEB

On this First Sunday in Lent the Psalmist reminds us of God’s untiring willingness to save those who devote themselves to God, not because they deserve it, but precisely because God chooses to do it. God saves.

As God protects the nesting turtledove, so God encircles our lives in troubling times. As God hears the cries of the dove, so God hears those who call out to God and God answers. All our days are spent in the heart of One whose Covenant Love spans the entirety of creation history. What is a lifetime for us on earth is but a moment for the One who is Eternity, still God chooses to spend that moment fully with us that we might experience the salvation God intends for all.

We are reminded of Jesus’ first words as He comes out from the wilderness after His Baptism and temptations, “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!” (Mark 1.15 CEB)

Now is the time, indeed, to turn around and nest ourselves in God’s Goodness, come to us in Jesus of Nazareth and present powerfully in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Turn around and experience the wonders of God’s salvation, even as He walks with us towards Jerusalem. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.



Prayer: Grant me a heart truly and deeply devoted to You, O God, that I might walk in your way with the Christ of my faith, and in the Spirit of your Abiding Love. Amen.